



Zion National Park Fire Management



East Mesa Prescribed Fire

In late April, fire management personnel from Zion National Park, with cooperation from our interagency partners, began implementation of the East Mesa Prescribed Fire. The East Mesa Burn Unit is located along the park's eastern boundary and had been previously identified as one of the six original wildland urban interface "Focus Areas" located in the Color Country Interagency Fire Management Area that required some type of immediate fuel reduction treatment to protect communities/properties at risk from the threat of wildland fire. The objectives of the East Mesa Rx were to provide protection for surrounding property and structures, reduce fuel loading and restore fire to its natural role in the ecosystem. A total of 1,835-acres in the 2,300-acre burn unit were treated in this phase of the project.

The project began with a 2-mile long blacklining operation along the park boundary. Ignition methods were used to carefully control fire behavior and intensity to reduce the risk of an escape onto bordering private lands. This treated area will tie into other treatment areas along the park's eastern boundary that have been completed in the past. The rest of the boundary of the burn unit was in areas where natural features such as slickrock or canyon cliffs were utilized as natural control lines. After the blacklining operation was complete, the interior of the unit was then ignited using hand-held drip torches. During this portion of the project, fire personnel were able to use ignition methods that resulted in higher fire intensities which were needed to meet overall objectives.

Ignition was conducted over a period of three days. Portions of the interior of the burn unit continued to slowly burn over several weeks. Smoke dispersal was very good during the burn due to favorable wind conditions and a high clearing index. Very few impacts from smoke were encountered during the burn. Some temporary trail closures were instituted in and adjacent to the burn unit, but were reopened as soon as it was safe to do so.

The dispersal of information before, during, and after the prescribed fire was critical to its success. Local citizens and business owners were contacted and made aware of the park's proposed burns through press releases, phone calls and personal visits. The park will continue to work with local residents and businesses to inform them of future planned prescribed burns and the management reasons for them.

The East Mesa Rx will benefit both Zion National Park and the landowners and residents of the East Zion area. The burn will not only provide them with a lowered risk from wildland fire, but will also benefit the plants and animals of the fire-adapted ponderosa pine ecosystem. The policy of using fire as a management tool will help decrease risks to life, property, and resources and will help perpetuate the values for which the park was established.

